



IWHRD Work

Sectoral monitoring on the situation of Indigenous Women and Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic



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LILAK (Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights) and Commission on Human Rights Gender Equality and Women's Rights Center



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Introduction

Judy Pasimio

On March 16, 2020, the Duterte government imposed a lockdown as it determined the presence of the highly infectious COVID- 19 in the country. In an attempt to control the spread of the virus, the entire Luzon and other major cities were immediately placed under the Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ), a strict stay-at-home policy to limit movement, and impose stringent physical distancing measures. Only essential travels were allowed such as individuals considered as frontliners, and quarantine passes issued by Local Government Units (LGUs) are required for people to get groceries, and medicine. Transportation and other establishments considered as non-essentials were not allowed to operate. These lockdown policies have great impacts on the Filipino families who suddenly had to stop working, stop going to school, and stay at home while worrying about their safety, their health, but more urgently, about their food on the table. This is the case with indigenous women and their families.

Third week into the lockdown, LILAK (Purple Action for Indigenous Women’s Rights) reached out to its partners to ask how they were. According to a Higaonon woman leader, “The drought brought in poor harvest. That’s why many of us in our community worked as farm workers, construction workers, and domestic helpers. But because of the lockdown, many of us were forced to stop working – by our employers to avoid transmitting the virus or because there was no more transportation that could take us to our jobs.” This was echoed by several others. Indigenous communities that were able to produce good crops, on the other hand, were then unable to sell them due to the quarantine. Earlier on, they were living on vegetables and root crops from their gardens. But they could not afford to buy rice, and anything else.

In some areas, the quarantine restrictions prohibited them from going into their own collective farms by the Barangay or local government units. This was the case for the T’boli-Manobo in Brgy. Ned, Lake Sebu. Furthermore, they were prevented from harvesting the vegetables and corn in their collective farm, by the presence of armed groups surrounding their farm. We see this as something beyond the COVID-19 issue. This was a sinister way of taking advantage of the medical emergency as a way to ease them out of their ancestral domain, given the expansion of the coffee plantation of the DMCI corporation.

Over the months, we saw the government creating a military-led COVID 19 Inter-Agency Task Force (IATF), implementing guidelines which seemed to be oblivious to the realities of the indigenous women on the ground - one of which is imposition of face masks and shields, with harsh penalties for people caught without them; wash hands with soap; social distancing. The realities then - because of the lockdown, indigenous women were finding it very difficult to put

food on the table. The common sentiment among our partners was “*sa gutom kami mamatay, hindi sa COVID- 19*”. (We will not die of COVID 19, but of hunger.”) How can they even afford face masks and shields? The government was not supporting them with these. When we spoke to the women in Marawi, who were still in the evacuation centers, they had no regular access to drinking water, let alone water for washing their hands and soap. Social distancing was an impossible measure to take for Teduray and Lambangian peoples who have been forced to abandon their communities as they were being fired at, houses burned, because of land conflict. As early as the first quarter of 2020, thousands have been displaced, and have set up their own makeshift evacuation centers - cramped, with no regular access to water, and lacking food.

These are the harsh realities of indigenous women and their families in the different parts of Mindanao, and Luzon. And how are these known, or considered by the IATF?

Most of the indigenous communities, accurate and timely information on COVID 19 was hard to come by - what is COVID 19, what is pandemic, how do we properly protect ourselves; also, information on *ayuda* (relief) - where to get this, how, who are eligible? This situation was not a priority of IATF response.

When *ayuda* was first rolled out, it was chaotic - no clear information was reaching the indigenous women - confusion on 4Ps or the Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program, benefits for senior citizens, and the lockdown *ayuda*. There was one experience, shared by an Erumanen Menuvu from Cotabato - that the *ayuda* from the local government was raffled off by the barangay.

Then there is the information on vaccine - what are these? why? how? Again, no systematic and culturally appropriate information campaign was done by the government. This has a significant impact on the vaccination hesitancy among the indigenous communities.

Meanwhile, as the indigenous women were finding ways to cope with the lack of food, and income, the military was making it more difficult for them. The militarist response of the Duterte government has paved the way for more human rights violations in the guise of health protocols. In one instance, the Mamanwa woman leader, who was distributing relief packs from LILAK to the families in her community, was harassed by the military, accusing her of distributing goods to rebels. In another province in Southern Tagalog, the indigenous woman leader who was also distributing relief packs, was visited by the military in her home. Out of fear, she then decided to stop receiving relief packs from LILAK, even, as she said, they badly needed these.

Two years into the pandemic, how are these issues being addressed by the government? How are the realities of indigenous women being taken into account by the IATF, by the agencies, and local government units?

As COVID-19 and its variants are reaching the indigenous communities, indigenous women are worried, and burdened with the increase in their care work. Their food security is deeply threatened, as well as their livelihood which are mostly based on natural resources. The

climate crisis that we are in now, as well as the corporate activities within their ancestral domain have exacerbated the impacts of the lockdown. The lack of nutritious food, and poor health service of the government, as well as the threat of COVID-19 are increasing the vulnerabilities of the indigenous families. The lack of educational support, as well as inferior internet and communications infrastructure, have made schooling more challenging than it ever was, for the indigenous children. All these are shouldered primarily by the women - as mothers, older sisters, and grandmothers. Their worries, anxieties and actual care work increased, compromising their own health - both physical and mental.

It is the obligation of the government to provide timely and appropriate support, that indigenous women can avail through non-discriminatory and empowering processes, and in a non-hostile environment. However, the government has failed to do so as seen in the experiences of the women from the indigenous communities in the participating provinces.

This documentation has proven that the stories and anecdotes we have been hearing from indigenous women - of hunger, of difficulties, particularly experienced by women and their families; and the lack of support from the government in this time of pandemic, are not isolated cases. There is a pattern of state neglect - a clear renegeing of the state obligations to its constituency, especially to those who lie in the margins of our society. The Magna Carta of Women or Rep. Act 9710 has identified indigenous women and girls as part of the marginalized sectors or groups of women whose rights need to be protected, fulfilled, and promoted in order to eliminate discrimination against them. However, the situation of the indigenous women and girls, especially in the time of pandemic, has shown that despite the law that directs more focused attention on them, the government has failed to do so.

This research jointly done by the Center for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights of the Commission on Human Rights and LILAK tried to get the response to these questions from the indigenous women participants coming from communities from Region X, XII, CAR and CARAGA.

In the focused group discussions, the indigenous women articulated recommendations that are sound, feasible and most of all, grounded on their realities. This research intends to forward them to different relevant government agencies who are responsible for direct services, policy makers, as well as civil society organizations which are doing policy and advocacy work. The insights of indigenous women and their experiences will also inform submissions to human rights treaty bodies and inputs to reports of human rights mandate holders.

As COVID-19 peaks, and plateaus, what is constant, is the woman's role - to take care of the family, in different ways. She does it out of love, or obligation, or fear that her family will suffer. She braves being exposed to COVID, just so she can earn for the family, or bring relief to the community. She puts herself last. She shares whatever little she has to her neighbor. She braves the red-tagging from the military as she asks difficult questions about government's

support; and asserts their rights over it. Indeed, to love is difficult in the time of COVID-19, and more difficult to live in the time of an authoritarian regime.

But she persists.

Sectoral Monitoring on the Situation of Indigenous Women and Girls During the Pandemic:

Indigenous Women Human Rights Defenders Work

Jayneca Reyes

Introduction

Land and natural environment are integral parts of indigenous people's lives, identity, and culture. As caretakers of their ancestral land and environment, indigenous peoples and their communities have been the constant victims of various forms of attacks, intimidation, and harassment in the Philippines. These challenges are often associated with the entry of destructive development projects in ancestral domains.

The Global Witness recorded 227 lethal attacks on human rights defenders and over half of these were directly linked to land and environmental defenders' opposition to destructive development projects such as mining, logging, and dams in the country. The report highlighted that for eight straight years since 2013, the Philippines ranks as the deadliest country for land and environmental defenders in Asia, and the third deadliest in the world.¹⁴

As part of the government's anti-insurgency campaign, the situation was further aggravated under the administration of President Rodrigo Duterte. In 2018, the President signed Executive Order 70 (E.O. 70) which mandates the creation of a National Task Force to End Local Communist and Armed Conflict (NTF-ELCAC). At the height of the pandemic in 2020, the highly contested and controversial Anti-Terrorism Bill was enacted as law. The institutionalization of laws, executive issuances, and other policies has intensified the intelligence-gathering and red-tagging¹⁵ in IP communities. Even indigenous young women leaders and girls are not spared from the threats and harassment.

Meanwhile, services and support of the government remain inaccessible for many indigenous communities in the country. This is especially true when the country was placed in a highly militarized lockdown to contain the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19). While civil

¹⁴ The Global Witness is an international non-government organization that releases annual reports on environmental destruction. They recorded a total of 29 killings of land and environmental defenders in 2020, and 43 in 2019.

¹⁵ Red-tagging or red-baiting is a dangerous strategy or act used by the State or by state agents that accuse, label, brand, and names individuals and/or organizations of being left-leaning, subversives, communists, or terrorists, against those perceived to be 'threats' or 'enemies of the State' (Simbulan, 2011).

society and humanitarian organizations continued to support these communities, they are also subject to intimidation, red-tagging, and harassment from security forces.

This report aims to present the situation of indigenous women human rights defenders before and during the pandemic. In particular, it aims to highlight the result of the survey conducted by the Center for Gender Equality and Women's Human Rights (CGEWHR) of the Commission on Human Rights, and LILAK Purple Action for Indigenous Women's Rights on the various challenges that indigenous women human rights defenders face in the time of the pandemic. It also attempts to identify the perceived forms of security risks in the communities. And finally, the report aims to provide recommendations for improving and mitigating the risks and challenges of indigenous women and girls including their communities.

Presentation of Data

This section presents the perception of indigenous women to women human rights defenders and their roles and issues in the community. Furthermore, it looks at the various security issues that indigenous women rights defenders confront given the restrictions imposed during the pandemic. The survey focuses on their perception prior to, and during the pandemic. Hence, the data were organized into three subsections. First, their perception during pre-pandemic is presented. This is followed by the data collected during the pandemic. And third, the notable convergences of data pre-pandemic to the pandemic are presented.

PRE-PANDEMIC

Do you consider yourself a human rights defender of indigenous women?

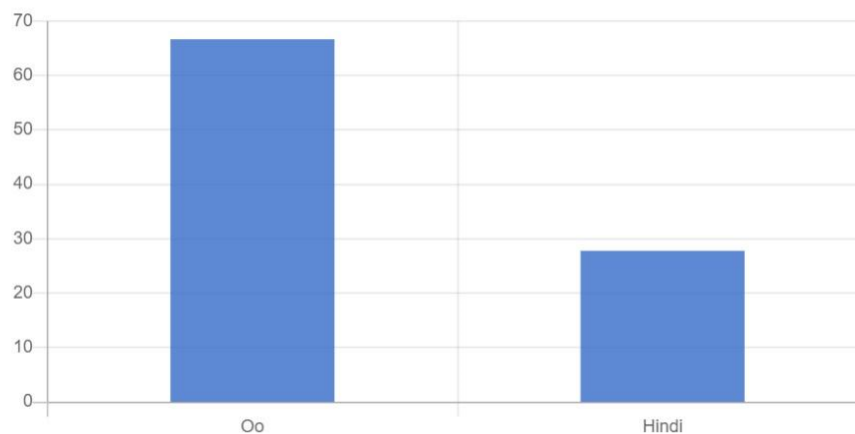


Figure 57. Indigenous women who consider themselves as human rights defenders

Among the indigenous women who participated in the survey, 66.67% said that they identify themselves as Human Rights Defenders (HRDs).¹⁶ Among the respondents, 36 described how their different levels of engagement within and beyond their community—as indigenous women, barangay Violence against Women and Children (VAWC) officers, community volunteers, advocates, mothers, and elders—are what make them HRDs.

On the other hand, 27.78% did not identify themselves as indigenous women rights defenders. During the FGD, some respondents said that they are not yet sure if they are worthy

¹⁶ Amnesty International defines Human Rights Defenders as individuals or group of individuals working to stop human rights abuses to ensure that everyone has access to their universal rights. HRDs can fulfill this through their job, profession, or volunteerism separate from their profession - a community worker, teacher, lawyer, a journalist, or activists working for human rights change.

to be identified as IWHRDs. One said she had no idea what a human rights defender meant. Three (3) respondents were not able to answer the survey question.

What issues do you think IWHRDs are focusing on in your area?

The table below shows the perceived issues that women rights defenders focus on as their area of work. Among the issues, gender-based violence ranked the highest. Different forms of discrimination and harassment, which include threats and intimidation, red-tagging, and bullying were mentioned 12 times and thus came in second. Land Issue and Indigenous Peoples’ Rights was mentioned 9 times. This was followed by Household and Marital Concerns with 6 mentions. Peace and Order and Livelihood concerns were both mentioned 3 times. Issues related to Leadership and Community Participation and Sexual and reproductive health, and rights were also mentioned twice. Meanwhile, Education and Climate Change were only mentioned once. On the other hand, there were 6 respondents who expressed that they have no idea what issues IWHRDs focus on in their communities. Twelve (12) respondents were not able to provide an answer to the question.

Table 19. Perceived issues that indigenous women human rights defenders focus on pre pandemic

Issues	Frequency
Gender-Based Violence	13
Discrimination and Harassment	12
Land Issue and IP Rights	9
Household and Marital Concerns	6
No Idea	6
Peace and Order	3
Livelihood	3
Leadership and Community Participation	2
Sexual and reproductive health, and rights	2
Education	1
Climate Change	1
No Answer	12

How does the community recognize indigenous women human rights defenders?

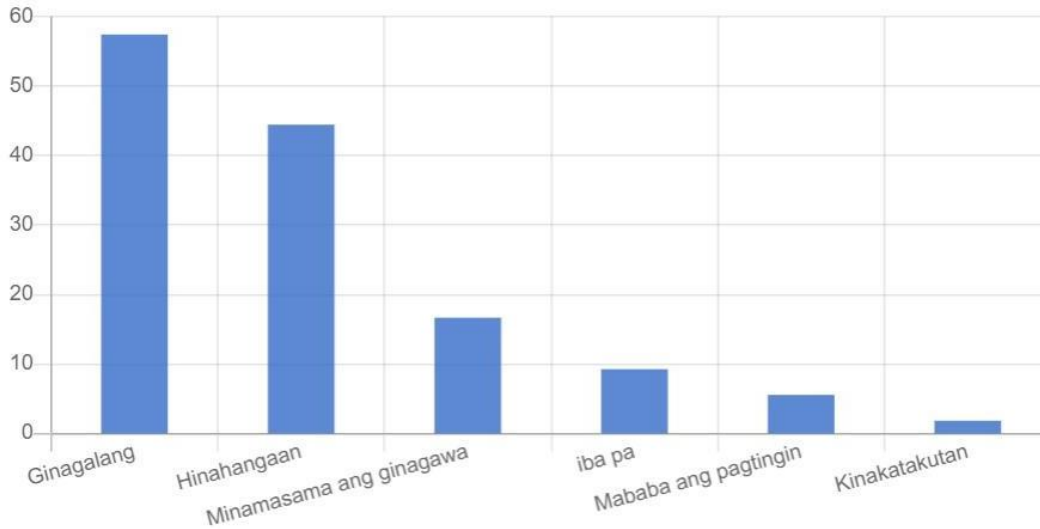


Figure 58. The community's perception on women human rights defenders

When asked how their communities recognize indigenous women human rights defenders, the respondents agree that they are recognized as vital and influential people in the community. 57.89% said that they are respected. Complementary to this, 45.61% also said that they are admired by the community.

On the other hand, 15.79% of the respondents mentioned that the initiatives of indigenous women rights defenders are taken badly by community leaders and community members. Meanwhile, 5.56% said that they are looked down on and one respondent mentioned that they are feared. Another 9.26% mentioned other perceptions and said that they are being hated or experienced hostility from some members of the community. Nine (9) respondents were not able to provide their answers to the question.

Who is expected to provide support to indigenous women human rights defenders?

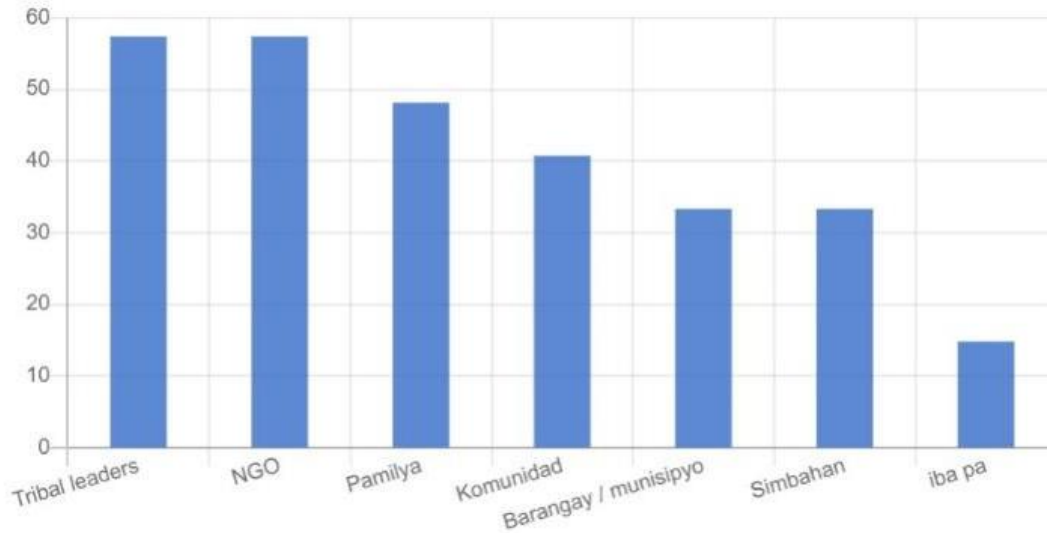


Figure 59. Support for indigenous women human rights defenders

The figure above shows that both the tribal leaders and non-government organizations are expected to have a significant role in providing support for women rights defenders with over 57.41%. Family support ranked second with 47.37%, followed by community with 38.6%. 33.33% of the respondents identified the government through the local government unit as a network of support and 31.58% for the church. 14.04% mentioned other types of support system which includes self, friends within the community and those in Metro Manila, organizations that they are a part of, and legal advisers. There were seven (7) respondents who were not able to answer the survey question.

DURING PANDEMIC

Do you consider yourself a human rights defender of indigenous women?

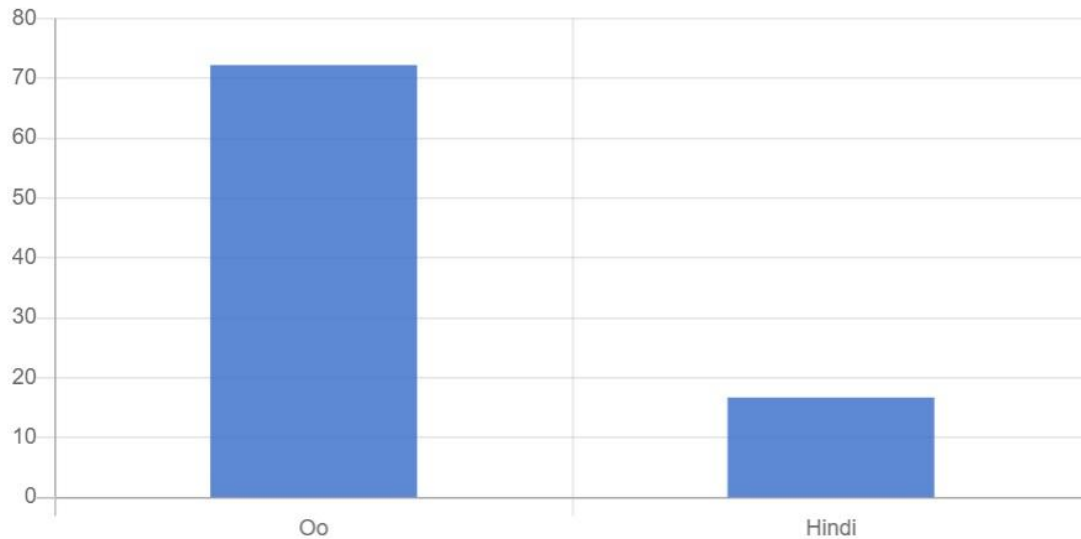


Figure 60. Indigenous women who consider themselves as human rights defenders during pandemic

During the pandemic, 39 respondents or 72.22% identify themselves as women rights defenders. Only 9 or 16.67% responded 'No' to the survey question. Meanwhile, there were seven (7) respondents who were not able to answer the question.

What issues do you think IWHRDs are focusing on in your area?

The table below shows that during the pandemic, gender-based violence ranked as the highest perceived primary issue in the communities. It was followed by 7 mentions of COVID-19 pandemic-related issues such as health, mobility restrictions, and access to financial assistance. Both Land Issue and IP Rights and Discrimination and Harassment came in third with 6 mentions. This is followed by Household and Marital Concerns and Livelihood with 4 mentions. There were also concerns with SRHR particularly teenage pregnancies with 3 mentions. Peace and Order and Education were only mentioned twice, while Leadership and Community Participation was only mentioned once. There were only 4 respondents who responded that they have no idea. Meanwhile, fourteen (14) respondents were not able to provide their answer to the survey question.

Table 20. The perceived issues that indigenous women human rights defenders focus on during the pandemic

Issues	Frequency
Gender-Based Violence	10
COVID19 Pandemic	7
Land Issue and IP Rights	6
Discrimination and Harassment	6
Household and Marital Concerns	4
Livelihood	4
No Idea	4
Sexual and reproductive health, and rights	3
Peace and Order	2
Education	2
Leadership & Community Participation	1
No Answer	14

How does the community recognize indigenous women human rights defenders?

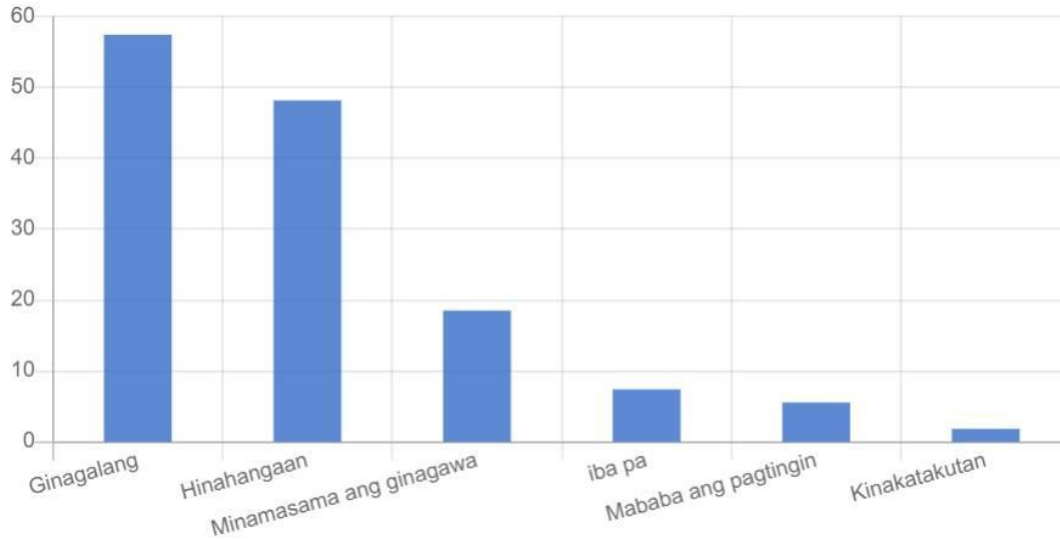


Table 21. The community's perception on women human rights defenders

The figure above shows that respondents still agree that women human rights defenders are recognized by their communities during the pandemic. 57.41% believe that they are respected and 48.15% said that they are admired by the community.

On the other hand, 18.52% of the respondents shared that the initiatives of indigenous women rights defenders are taken badly by some members of the community. 5.56% of the respondents said that they are looked down and one mentioned that they are feared. Another 7.41% mentioned other perceptions and said that they are being hated or experiencing hostility from some members of the community. Meanwhile, there were eight (8) respondents who were not able to provide their answers to the survey question.

Who is expected to provide support to indigenous women human rights defenders?

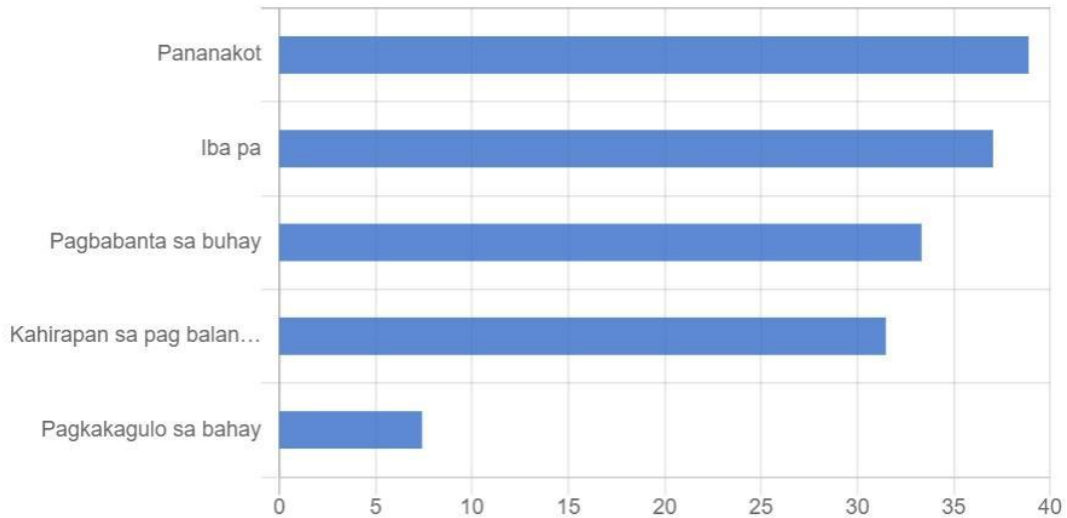


Figure 61. Difficulties and challenges that indigenous woman human rights defenders confront

The figure above shows the perceived challenges during the pandemic that women rights defenders confront in line with their work. Among the challenges mentioned, different forms of harassment ranked the highest with 38.6%. This was followed by death threats with 35.09%. 29.82% also mentioned difficulty in balancing their advocacy with their personal lives. Meanwhile, 8.77% noted that their family relationships are also affected. Another 36.84% of the respondents mentioned other forms of challenges that women rights defenders confront that vary from access to legal support and verbal attacks from uniformed personnel to personal illness. There were thirteen (13) respondents who were not able to answer the question.

Who is expected to provide support to indigenous women human rights defenders?

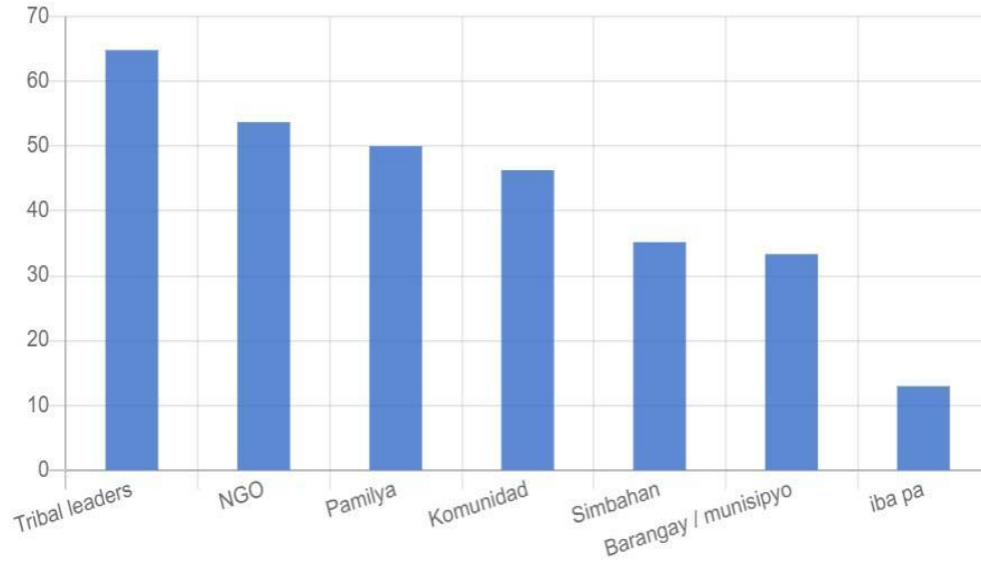


Figure 62. Support for indigenous women human rights defenders during the pandemic

The figure above shows that tribal leaders are still perceived to have a significant role in providing support for women rights defenders with 64.81%. This was followed by 53.7% where they seek the support of non-government organizations. Family support ranked third with 50%, followed by community with 46.3%. Several respondents of 33.33%, identified the government through the local government unit as a network of support, and 35.19% identified the church. Whereas 12.96% mentioned other types of support system which includes the self, friends within the community and those in Metro Manila, organizations that they are a part of, and legal advisers. On the other hand, there were eight (8) respondents who were not able to answer the survey question.

Comparative Presentation of Data

Indigenous Women Who Consider Themselves as Human Rights Defenders Pre-Pandemic and During Pandemic

The table below shows that pre-pandemic, 37 indigenous women or 64.91% of the total number of respondents identify themselves as IWHRDs. It can be observed that there was an increase in indigenous women who identify themselves as women rights defenders during the COVID-19 pandemic with 40 respondents or 70.18%. On the other hand, 19.3% did not identify themselves as women rights defenders during the pandemic. However, most of them said that they still need to learn a lot to deserve becoming an IWHRD. Some said that they are still new and are still familiarizing themselves with the issues of their communities.

Table 22. Responses of indigenous women who identifies themselves as human rights defenders Pre-Pandemic and During Pandemic

Value	Pre-Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	37	64.91%	40	70.18%
No	16	28.07%	11	19.3%
No Response	3	5.55%	6	11.11%

Issues That Indigenous Women Human Rights Defenders Focus on Pre-Pandemic And During Pandemic

The table below gender-based violence remains the primary issue that women rights defenders focus on in their communities both before and during the pandemic. While the number of perceived attentions on GBV issues slightly decreased, it still ranked the highest during the pandemic. Attention to issues related to discrimination and harassment significantly decreased as well during the pandemic. However, it must be noted that the decrease in the perceived attention given to discrimination and harassment issues does not necessarily mean a decline in cases of harassment and red-tagging experienced by indigenous women in the communities.

A slight increase of perceived attention given to issues related to livelihood, education, and SRHR can also be observed in the table below. Climate change was mentioned once before the pandemic but scored zero during the pandemic. On the other hand, COVID19-related issues were added to the list because it was mentioned 7 times by the respondents.

The slight decrease and increase in the data may be attributed to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in the country. Many of the respondents claim that their focus shifted to health and economic survival during the pandemic. Some also mentioned the adjustment needed for online and modular learning and the increase in teenage pregnancy cases in their communities as issues that arose and became significant during the pandemic.

Table 23. Comparison of perceived issues that indigenous women human rights defenders focus on Pre-Pandemic and During Pandemic

Issues	Pre-Pandemic	Pandemic
Gender-Based Violence	13	10
Discrimination and Harassment	12	6
Land Issue and IP Rights	9	6
Household and Marital Concerns	6	4
No Idea	6	4
Peace and Order	3	2
Livelihood	3	4
Leadership and Community Participation	2	1
Sexual and reproductive health, and rights	2	3
Education	1	2
Climate Change	1	0
COVID19	0	7
No Response	12	14

Recognition Of Women Human Rights Defenders In Their Communities Pre-Pandemic And During Pandemic

In the table below, respondents of the survey agree that women human rights defenders are recognized by their communities as vital and influential people in the community prior to and during the pandemic. It can be observed that there was an increase in perceived admiration toward their work during the pandemic. Meanwhile, there was also a slight increase in the negative perception of their work.

Table 24. Responses of indigenous women on how human rights defenders are recognized in their communities.

Value	Pre-Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Respected	33	57.89%	33	57.89%
Admired	26	45.61%	28	49.12%
Efforts are taken badly by the community	9	15.79%	10	17.54%
Others	5	8.77%	4	7.02%
Looked down by the community	3	5.26%	3	5.26%
Feared	1	1.75%	1	1.75%
No Response	9	16.66%	8	14.81

Support received by Women Human Rights Defenders Pre-Pandemic and During Pandemic

The data below shows that tribal leaders and NGOs are expected to have a significant role in providing support for women rights defenders. The number has increased for tribal leaders from 57.89% to 64.91% during the pandemic, for families 47.37% to 49.12%, for community 38.6% to 45.61%, and for LGUs and church from 31.58% to 35.09%. The slight decrease in NGOs support may be attributed to the mobility and travel restrictions that came with the implementation of lockdowns.

Table 25. Responses of indigenous women when asked who they think are expected to give support for human rights defenders

Value	Pre-Pandemic		During Pandemic	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Tribal leaders	33	57.89%	37	64.91%
NGO	31	54.39%	30	52.63%
Pamilya	27	47.37%	28	49.12%
Komunidad	22	38.6%	26	45.61%
Barangay / munisipyo	19	33.33%	20	35.09%
Simbahan	18	31.58%	20	35.09%
Others	8	14.04%	7	12.28%
No Response	7	12.96%	8	14.81

In this section, the data presented the perceptions of indigenous women on the following: their own situation, women rights defenders, issues in communities, their challenges and difficulties, and the available network of support for them before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. A comparative presentation of data was also shown with notable differences which can be observed in four criteria. First, there was an increase in the number of women who identify themselves as HRDs during the pandemic. Second, there was a decrease in the number of indigenous women who perceived gender-based violence as the primary issue in their communities during the pandemic—however, it must be noted that while the number decreased, it remains to be the highest perceived issue among indigenous women. Third, indigenous women confront various threats and harassment from the state and its agents, corporations, community, and even within the family. And fourth, tribal leaders and non-government organizations are perceived to have a significant role as a network of support for indigenous women and their communities.

Analysis

“Tinuturing ko po [ang] sarili ko na [isang] Human Rights Defender... ngayon nga po ay may mga bisita... pinupuntahan ako dito sa bahay.”

[I consider myself a Human Rights Defender... now I have guests... they come to visit here at my home."]¹⁷

Resource conflicts fueled by large projects make indigenous peoples more vulnerable to violence and abuse. This has often caused displacement, malnutrition, landlessness, and unemployment which further contributes to their invisibility and marginalization. In the Philippines, they are among the poorest and most disadvantaged social groups with a lack of basic social services and support from the government (De Vera, 2007). Exacerbating this situation is the lack of, or non-implementation of laws and policies that protect and respect their rights. On the other hand, Indigenous women and girls carry multiple burdens, both as part of the indigenous community and as women. Indigenous women and girls are expected to do care work for their family and in ensure that there is food. They are also at the frontlines of defense work to protect their land and natural resources. Meanwhile, patriarchal systems within IP communities and organizations are still very much embedded. Values and attitudes towards indigenous women are still patriarchal. Thus, there is a very limited space for indigenous women and girls’ voices and participation in the discussion—it further contributes to their invisibility, discrimination, and vulnerabilities to gender-based violence.

COVID-19 has introduced a new range of challenges to indigenous women and girls. The pandemic has worsened the already difficult situation in communities such as food insecurity and their lack of access to basic social services and timely information. The indigenous women who participated in the survey and focus group discussion came from different communities. All of them shared diverse issues that they confront in their everyday lives. Most of these issues were already existing, even prior to the pandemic, and these were directly or indirectly worsened by the onset of the pandemic and by the implementation of lockdowns in the country. Through these data, several observations can be made.

¹⁷ The quote above came from one of the respondents for this survey. She said this while looking at her doorway, trying to be alert, and with a hushed voice continuously engaged in the focus group discussion. She refers to military forces’ presence in their community as *bisita* or guests.

Indigenous Women Rights Defenders and Their Security

Indigenous women rights defenders in the Philippines remain to be under threat, and these threats to their lives and security must be addressed. Forms of threats and attacks may vary from: red-tagging, death threats sent through text messages, false accusations both online and 'offline', verbal attacks, harassment, and discrimination from uniformed personnel and state agents. Some of them are even experiencing intensified surveillance from the military.

The threats and attacks against women human rights defenders are tied to their defense work in asserting rights in land and natural resources. For instance, a respondent said that her assertion of their right to their ancestral land and their right to oppose huge corporate projects such as industrialized plantations have greatly contributed to the challenges and difficulties that she is confronting in the community. Consequently, she believes that her vocal and staunch position causes intense surveillance and threats against her.

Another respondent shared that the threats, attacks, and accusations against them are part of their active advocacy work and volunteerism within the community. She articulated that red-tagging and intimidation are consequences of their initiatives.

“May hinahawakan kaming kaso na limang rape cases. Yung mga bata na biktima ang lumalapit [sa amin] kasi ayaw maniwala ng mga nanay. Ang suspect ay mga tatay nila, kuya, stepfather... Hinahabol na naman kami ngayon dahil sa cases na ito. Sinasabihan kami na NPA daw kami, at yung mga kausap namin mga NPA daw.”

[We are currently assisting victims of five rape cases. The victims, who are all children, went to us because their mothers wouldn't believe them. The suspects are their father, brother, and stepfather... Now, we are being harassed because of these cases. They are accusing us and our networks as of being members of the New Peoples Army (NPA).]

Both men and women who speak critically and stand against human rights violations and atrocities can be targeted, threatened, and harassed. However, there are forms of harassment and intimidation that mostly only women experience. These are rape threats, sexual harassment, and threats that insinuate physical or sexual assault against their children who are also women. Often these threats are made by men and male tribal leaders.

“Marami kaming natanggap na death threats. Na ri-rape-in ako... Sinusundan ako ng mga lalaki. Isa kasi ako sa mga umaayaw talaga... bakit tayo magpapapasok ng mga korporasyon sa lupa natin. Pinapalibutan kami, binabantaan sa tinitirahan namin. Gumagapang na lang kami para di kami makita.”

[We receive a lot of death threats. I receive rape threats... men follow me. Because I am really against it... why would we allow corporations to enter our land. They

surround us even in our homes. We just stay down and we crawl so they can't see us.]

Land-grabbing, militarization, red-tagging, harassment, and killings of indigenous peoples intensified under the Duterte government. Duterte's marching orders are to shoot anyone against the government.⁴ In his last State of the Nation Address (SONA), President Duterte mentioned indigenous peoples once, and only in the context of insurgency.

The state policies and the framework of government agencies working on the protection and promotion of indigenous peoples are also geared on the anti-insurgency campaign of the government and have aggravated the situation. Further exacerbating the situation is the pandemic and the militarist approach in handling it.

Human Rights and Women Rights Defenders

Sabi nila [ang] liit-liit ko lang daw. Madaling itapon o patayin... Pero kahit na ganoon, 'di ako takot... para sa akin, patuloy parin.

[They said I am so tiny, and they can easily dispose and kill me. Despite that, I am not afraid... For I must go on.]

Indigenous women and girls take pride in their advocacies, volunteerism, and community work. The image of an indigenous women human rights defender is characterized by the respondents with selflessness, *pakikipagkapwa* or fellowship, and *pakikiisa* or solidarity. However, there is hesitation in recognizing the position and role they occupy as Human Rights Defenders. Their recognition as HRDs and as a woman leader is not always explicitly articulated. Indigenous women working in defending their rights and responding to issues comes from the innate nature of assuming a leadership role without assuming a title. They continue to work as indigenous women rights defenders without the consciousness that they *are* Human Rights Defenders. It is important that indigenous women not only recognize themselves as Human Rights Defenders, but also know their rights as IWRHDs, organize themselves, and work with HRDs from other sectors. Asserting their identities as IWRHDs will also strengthen the indigenous peoples' campaign against the criminalization of their struggles and the assertion of their rights.

Pandemic Effect

COVID-19 has exacerbated deeply rooted and existing challenges and difficulties of indigenous women and girls. While they remain committed to advocating for various issues, the COVID-19 pandemic has added a burden to their work. This is evident in the data as presented in Table 4 which showed a shift in what they perceive as primary issues within the communities. Many community-based organizations have also shifted and adjusted to respond to urgent needs brought by the pandemic and lockdowns. From the point of view of indigenous women, the pandemic has shifted the focus and priorities of women rights defenders, as the health and food crises presented interrelated concerns which are tied to livelihood, education, family, and community.

Tribal leaders and non-government organizations are important networks of support for indigenous women rights defenders. Most of them said that they get strength from their tribal leaders to continue to fight for what they believe in. For them to advance their advocacies and campaigns, they seek the support of NGOs to amplify their voices and issues on a national scale. They said that skills-sharing, and other capacity development trainings provided by NGOs help boost their confidence as indigenous women, and in effect, this helps them actively participate and engage in community discussions and activities.

Finally, despite the difficulties and challenges, indigenous women continue to work and fight to defend their rights. Most of them identify as indigenous women human rights defenders. In relation to this, the majority of the respondents put high regard to the role of indigenous women human rights defenders in forwarding the indigenous women agenda and cause. Hence, the common perception is that indigenous women rights defenders are respected and admired in their communities.

Recommendations

SERVICE

- CHR should amplify community-based programs to bolster networks of support for indigenous women rights defenders;
- Develop safety and security protocols for various types of risks experienced by indigenous women rights defenders;
- Conduct trainings and discussions with the state security forces on the rights of IWHRDs;
- Popularize and make accessible a comprehensive support for IWHRDs at risk, and include psycho-social support, sanctuary, and economic support for IWHRDs and their families;
- Popularize Human Rights Defenders and their Rights;
- For concerned line agencies such as DILG and DSWD to ensure that GBV/VAW desks in barangays are established and are effectively and efficiently functioning to respond to the needs of victims/survivors including access to justice;

- Develop IEC materials, preferably in local dialect, featuring IP Human Rights Defenders stories and disseminate to the community to counter the narrative against human rights and human rights defenders;
- Develop human rights-based programs to address ESCR issues that were aggravated further by the pandemic;
- Provide support and services that strengthen and encourage community participation, particularly that of indigenous women and girls;
- Develop human rights-based programs to address ESCR issues that were aggravated by the pandemic;
- Continuous skills and capacity development trainings that aim to empower IP women and girls;
- NCIP should fulfill its mandate and to work not within the framework of anti-insurgency but within the framework of promoting and protecting indigenous people's rights;

POLICY

- To push for the enactment of HRD Protection Bill'
- Abolish Anti-Terrorism Law of 2020 and NTF-ELCAC'
- Expedite the enactment of the Anti-Red-Tagging Bill that criminalized red-tagging and impose sanctions to perpetrators, including those in the government; and
- Ban military troops and paramilitary groups in ancestral domains.